

Paper: 07; Module No: 34: E Text

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(B) Description of Module:

Items	Description of Module
Subject Name:	English
Paper No & Name:	07; Canadian, Australian and South Pacific Literatures in English
Module No & Title:	34; Māori Plays of the South Pacific: Hone Kouka – <i>Nga Tangata Toa</i> (1994)
Pre-requisites:	Basic knowledge of English Language
Objectives:	To have an overview of Māori Plays with special reference to Hone Kouka
Key Words:	Indigeneity, Drama, Marae, Māori , Oral, Performance

Introduction:

Originating in Polynesia and sharing features with languages from the eastern parts of the South Pacific such as Rarotongan, Tahitian, and Hawaiian, Māori language has flourished in New Zealand for over a thousand years. The language of today developed with the occupation of Aotearoa by Eastern Polynesian immigrants in AD 800. The language has variations across the South and North Island communities, and within the North Island indigenous communities, the language differs across east and west – though in all cases, the language is still mutually intelligible.

However, given the impact of colonization and the hegemonizing presence of the English language, Māori language suffered a crisis until recent years, where there has been a concerted and sincere effort towards a rejuvenation and revival of the language as a living practice. Learning programmes, concerned linguists and activists and New Zealand's official policy to have Māori as an official language – are all reasons of the survival of the language in its present form today. Māori today thrives as the language in street signs, cultural gatherings, oral traditions as well as modern publications of children and adults.

Māoris have a strong oral tradition as well integral to their Polynesian heritage. The oral is part of a ritualistic tradition which upholds the Māori way of life through diverse knowledge systems. Genealogy, incantations, rituals, song, prose narratives and dance encapsulate the various ramifications of oral traditions. The tradition is founded upon a common heritage, preserved by various communities in Aotearoa. Oral texts were composed, memorized and narrated with ceremony and religious rituals. Each occasion merited the observation of songs, chants and complex overviews on the Indigenous world. The oral tradition is a living experience of Māori life since it is intimately connected to the idea of performance and spiritual existence.

The beginning of Māori writing script may be ascertained from the works of a lay reader of the Church missionary society, a Cambridge scholar and two Māori chiefs in 1820. The Williams family of clerics and missionaries promoted the use of the written script and devised the structure and vocabulary. The Māori -English dictionary entitled *A Dictionary of the New Zealand Language and a Concise Grammar*; to which are *Added a Selection of Colloquial Sentences* (1844), which, after revision, seven editions, and a new title, *A Dictionary of the Māori Language* (7th edn, 1971), were produced by William Williams and

his grandson, Herbert Williams. W. L. Williams (son of William Williams) was responsible for the compilation of the grammar book with the title *First Lessons in the Māori Language with a Short Vocabulary* (1862), with later editions revised by his son Herbert W. Williams.

In 1969, linguist Bruce Biggs authored the seminal book on Māori linguistic system and pedagogy entitled *Let's Learn Māori*. Biggs also wrote the *Complete English-Māori Dictionary* (1981), which largely comprises the English meanings taken from the Māori headwords in Williams' dictionary. Further, new words and terms were also recorded in phenomenal H. M. Ngata's *English-Māori Dictionary* (1993) --- which provides an intricate and scholarly illustration of colloquial, formal and classical usage of Māori language. The Māori Language Commission's *Te Matatiki* (1996) further enhanced the structural framework and vocabulary.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a large number of publications on Māori language and teaching such as John Moorfield's series *Te Whanake* (1987-2002), and the linguistic analysis by Winifred Bauer, *Māori* (1993). Cleve Barlow's translation of Biggs's *Let's Learn Māori* as *Me Ako Taatou i te Reo Māori* (1990) is one of the first major workers on Māori language in Māori.

Initial written literature in Māori reflected the religious and political proclivities of the church and state and their imperialist aspirations. Herbert W. Williams' *A Bibliography of Printed Māori to 1900* (1924) provides a well-documented resource on such publications. As the written script established itself, the Bible, orders of service, hymns and church doctrines were translated into Māori. Further, government aided publications disseminated information on British and European cultural, political and social history and policy to Māori readers in Māori. As government, churches, philanthropists, activists promoted the use of Māori language to divulge their local and international activities, Māori newspapers flourished in the nineteenth century. Newspapers also became the medium of protest used by Māori individuals, the Māori Parliament and members of the Māori King Movement to express resistance against colonial rule since the 1850s. Also, letters from Māori people to government officers, records of tribal meetings and minutes of the Māori Land Court constitute significant unpublished material in Māori and also provide evidence on crucial linkages between oral traditions and the written script.

Therefore, since the 1840s, personal records of Indigenous history, customary practices, genealogies, songs, proverbs, idioms have been retained in written Māori. However, these have been mostly preserved as private documents rather than for public usage. The decline of the use of Māori, the concerns of making public traditional language are some of the reasons as to why these documents have not been printed as widely. In recent years, some such personal records have been brought to the public domain and constitute a very rich Māori written tradition as well.

Much of Oral Māori literature today can be accumulated from public libraries where nineteenth century linguist, anthropologists, administrators, folklorists, or missionaries collected the material in the form of genealogy, song or incantations. For instance, governor Sir George Grey and government official John White obtained similar material from Indigenous communities. In Grey's and White's collections are manuscripts by several Māori writers, notably Aperahama Taonui and Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke. From such material, Grey published innumerable works, including *Ko Nga Mahinga a Nga Tupuna* (1854, with a very free English version, in *Polynesian Mythology*, published in 1855). This book contains heavily edited narratives on the creation of human life, legendary heroes and the settlement of Indigenous groups in Aotearoa. In *Ko Nga Moteatea me Nga Hakirara o Nga Māori* (1853) Grey published nearly five hundred texts of the song poems. White's six-volume *Ancient History of the Māori* (1887-90) encapsulates the creation of the gods and human life, through the migration and settlement of Aotearoa, to the arrival of the Europeans.

S. Percy Smith's *Māori Wars of the Nineteenth Century* (1910), and Elsdon Best's monographs on customary practices and Indigenous history, *Tuhoe* (1925) are both books based on informants' data and are evidence of the passionate interest in Māori traditions nurtured by Europeans in the early years of the twentieth century. *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1892-) is a substantial resource of articles in Māori about Indigenous knowledge systems. Bilingual texts with histories written in English and extensive quotations in Māori have seen the light of the day in the middle of the twentieth century such as J. H. Mitchell's *Takitimu* (1944) and John Grace's *Tuwharetoa* (1959). The oral indigenous inheritance has been inscribed in the written and published in Māori with English translation as emblematic in Anaru Reedy's edition of his ancestors' writings, *Nga Korero a Mohi Ruatapu* (1993), and *Pei Te Hurinui*, Jones and Bruce Biggs's history of the Tainui people, *Nga Iwi o Tainui* (1995).

From the 1960s scholars have also published from Māori manuscripts, with translation, such as the ethnographic monograph *Māori Marriage* (1960) by Bruce Biggs and the compilation *He Whiriwhiringa* (1997), Margaret Orbell's *Traditional Māori Stories* (1992), Agathe Thornton's *The Story of Maui by Te Rangikaheke* (1992), and in the journal *Te Karanga* (1985-90). Songs from the oral tradition have also been extensively published. The song poems of the oral tradition find frequent publication. Three volumes of *Nga Moteatea* (1959, 1961, 1970), compiled by Māori scholars Sir Apirana Ngata and Pei Te Hurinui Jones, are wonderful in combining song texts with extensively annotated translations. Discourse about the oral tradition, almost always in English, has also favoured the song texts, as in Margaret Orbell's *Māori Poetry* (1978). The formulaic oral tradition is reflected in the sayings compiled by Hirini Moko Mead and Neil Grove, *Nga Papeha a nga Tipuna* (2001).

C. R. H. Taylor's comprehensive work *A Bibliography of Publications on the New Zealand Māori* (1972) discusses traditional Māori culture. Jeffrey Sissons, Pat Hohepa and Wiremu Wi Hongi's *The Puriri Trees are Laughing* (1987) discusses Indigenous history while Māori knowledge systems are revised in Margaret Orbell's *Hawaiki: A New Approach to Māori Tradition* (1985) and Agathe Thornton offers a comparative study of Māori and Greek literatures in *Māori Oral Literature* (1987).

Well known Māori writers such as Patricia Grace and Katerina Mataira have produced books for children to learn Māori. Cleve Barlow published a bilingual edition on cultural concepts, *Tikanga Whakaaro* (1991); companion volumes to the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography was published as *Nga Tangata Taumata Rau* (1990-2000); books were written about individual lives --- the minister, Hemi Potatau's autobiography *He Hokinga Mahara* (1991), Ruka Broughton's told the story of his ancestor *Ngaa Mahi Whakaari a Tiitokowaru* (1993); elders' published and unpublished articles and letters were edited by Wiremu and Te Ohore Kaa (1994, 1996), and nineteenth-century newspaper correspondence was reproduced with translation by Margaret Orbell, in *He Reta ki te Maunga* (2002).

Song texts have also been an important part of Māori cultural traditions. D.S. Long and Witi Ihimaera edited *Into the World of Light* (1982) dedicated to life and works of composer Tuini Ngawai. Again, *Tuini, Her Life and Her Songs* (1985) has been compiled by Ngoi Pewhairangi. Song texts have also been published in *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985) and *The Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* (1989), both edited by Harvey McQueen and Ian Wedde; and in Margaret Orbell's *Waiata*:

Māori Songs in History (1991). Song texts are symptomatic of a thriving tradition of performance and a living language that has evolved with contemporary glocal changes.

Performance is an integral part of Māori oral tradition. Storytelling, dance, music and games were enacted on traditional sites called “Whare tapere” central to Māori society. The “whare tapere” indicated an outdoor location, or the base of a tree which was designated as the space for performance. A whare mātoro was a form of whare tapere that offered entertainment specifically by and for young people in the community. A travelling troupe of entertainers who staged whare tapere in a succession of communities was called a whare karioi.

By the late nineteenth century, with the onslaught of colonization, whare tapere as a tradition was being eradicated with the loss of its associated customs. In 2008, the Ōrotokare Trust was formed by Charles Royal. The trust aimed at rejuvenating the whare tapere tradition by offering a conglomeration of the old performative rituals and new approaches to Māori performing arts. In 2010, the trust held its first whare tapere at Waimango marae, Hauraki. There have been several performances since with the usage of traditional Māori instruments and marionette type puppets called karetao as well as the presence of modern digital soundscapes.

The dramatic elements in Māori forms such as *haka* were exploited in early New Zealand stage dramas such as *The land of the moa* (1895) and *Tapu* (1903). Māori people were given only minor roles in these productions and were almost never consulted over the script or the staging. The very early feature film entitled *Hinemoa* (1914) employed Māori actors, but did not involve Māori expertise on the content. Some of Rudall Hayward’s films, such as *Rewi’s last stand* (1940), were exceptional since attempts were made to incorporate Māori viewpoints therein. The ambitious 1941 production of *Hinemoa* in Rotorua by the Māori Musical Society offer evidence of Māori initiative and demonstration of culture and art.

The first New Zealand play reflecting domestic racial relations can be found in Bruce Mason’s *The Pohutukawa Tree* (1957). While Director Richard Campion struggled to find Māori for the lead roles, he was lucky to find Māori actress Hira Tauwhare who gave a powerful performance in the role of the protagonist, Aroha Mataira. In 1971 *Te raukura: the feathers of the albatross*, the first play by a Māori playwright was written by journalist Harry Dansey. The play dealt with the destruction of Te Whiti’s settlement at Parihaka, and was first staged, with George Henare as Te Whiti, at Auckland’s Mercury Theatre in 1972. Two

years later *Te raukura* was performed at Wellington's Ngāti Pōneke marae by members of Victoria University's Te Reo Māori Society. Henare also starred as Hongi Hika in the highly successful musical *Mr King Hongi*, first produced at Auckland's Mercury Theatre in 1973.

In 1965 the New Zealand Opera Company performed *Porgy and Bess*, George Gershwin's opera of African-American life, with Īnia Te Wīata in the lead and 30 other Māori in the chorus. Several of them, such as Don Selwyn, George Henare and Apirana Taylor, went on to become leading theatre personalities. The success of this production led to the establishment of the Māori Theatre Trust. In 1967 the Trust performed a classical drama, *He mana toa*, and a comedy of life before European settlement, *The golden lover*. Both plays paved a new direction and sense of identity in Māori theatre. In 1970 the Māori Theatre Trust embarked on an international tour whereby members first contributed to New Zealand's large-scale pageant at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan, then toured to Hungary and several cities in the then Soviet Union. The Trust eventually disbanded due to financial crisis.

The mid - 1970s witnessed a revival of Māori theatre with the rise of Māori political activism. In 1976, Te Ika a Maui Players was the first theatre company formed and run by Māori and staged Rowley Habib's *The death of the land*. For three years, the play toured nationally and it was also rendered for television in 1978. Two founding members of Te Ika a Maui, Jim Moriarty and Brian Potiki would soon become well known theatre personalities themselves. In fact, it was Potiki who formed the radical theatre company Maranga Mai which staged contemporary events from the Māori political movement. In 1979, the company toured schools, marae and also gave an invited performance at Parliament Buildings in Wellington. While they invited much adverse criticism for provoking 'racial disharmony' but the Maranga Mai also encouraged young Māori to join theatre such as the Samoan actor Eteuati Ete. The 1970s saw the emergence of Māori graduates in theatre such as Rawiri Paratene from the QE II Arts Council Drama School (later the NZ Drama School and Toi Whakaari) in 1972. Rangimoana Taylor graduated in 1975 and would then go on to form the Te Ohu Whakaari, a Māori theatre cooperative. Through its extensive tours in schools and marae for 15 years, this group performed stories on the basis of lives of individuals and events in Māori history. Te Ohu Whakaari went on to produce plays written by Rangimoana's brother Apirana Taylor (*Kohanga, Te whanau a Tuanui Jones*), and their sister Riwia Brown (*Roimata, Te hokinga, Nga wahine*). Founding member Briar Grace-Smith, who was 17 when Te Ohu Whakaari was set up, later became a noted playwright.

In 1983, the Depot Theatre (later renamed as Taki Rua) was opened in Wellington with the aim of producing work from New Zealand only. They produced significant Māori plays such as *Nga morehu* and *Tupuna* (1987) and *Fragments of a childhood* (1988) – all by Rowley Habib. One of the founder members of this group was Hone Kouka (1966 -). Kouka, Ngati Porou, Ngati Raukawa, Ngati Kahungunu, attained fame with his plays based on specifically Māori themes. For *Hide 'n' Seek*, with Hori Ahipene in 1992, he became the youngest playwright to receive the Bruce Mason Award. A versatile writer of short fiction, poetry and children's writing, he has worked as a theatre artistic director and in journalism as well. Graduating in English from University of Otago 1988 and from Toi Whakaari / New Zealand Drama School 1990, he has collaborated with director Colin McColl in the hugely successful *Nga Tangata Toa*, a version of Ibsen's revenge play *The Vikings*, performed in Wellington and Auckland 1995. Set on the East Coast in 1916, the play is concerned with family conflicts (a recurrent Kouka theme) on the return to the marae of a war hero, and the dramatic dominance of the woman warrior Rongomai. According to David Carnegie, "Hone Kouka has both extended the range of contemporary Māori drama, and avoided its two frequent pitfalls: tired Western televisual dramaturgy, and adaptation of traditional Māori song and dance into a merely ornamental alternative to substantial dramatic complexity."¹ His other plays include *Mauri Tu*, *Hide 'n' Seek* and *Five Angels*. The 1996 New Zealand International Festival of the Arts commissioned *Waiora Te U Kai Po (The Homeland)* for a national and international tour and in 1997, published it with an introduction by Roma Potiki and afterword by Judith Dale. The play comprises waiata and haka by Hone Hurihanganui, performed by spirit characters enmeshed in conflict and conscience. Reflecting on the predicament of a sawmill worker's family who left their home in the North Island in search of work at Christchurch, the play highlights the irony inherent in the immigrant status of the Māori. The 1956 setting of the play replicates both racial tensions in New Zealand as well as the forces of global historical and political changes. *The Prophet* (2006) completes a trilogy of plays including *Waiora* and *Home Fires*, and is as powerful as Kouka's earlier oeuvre.

The 1990s witnessed the powerful presence of Māori theatre in New Zealand with worldwide recognition. In 1991 John Broughton's passionate monologue entitled *Michael James Manaia* was first performed by Jim Moriarty at the Edinburgh Festival. In that year Hone Kouka's *Nga tangata toa*, an epic based on Ibsen's *The Vikings at Helgeland*, was

¹ Carnegie, David. "Theatre Journal." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1995, pp. 310–311. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3208498. Accessed 25.12.2017.

developed in collaboration with Norwegian theatre worker Halldis Hoaas. The protagonist Rongomai was played by the brilliant actor Nancy Brunning. Carnegie writes: “The 1919 Māori society of this play is volatile in ways that resonate with contemporary political concerns: they are a people undergoing the stress of change. Taneatua's wife, wearing the traditional women's moko (chin tattoo), has been content to keep the home fires burning for her warrior husband. Rongomai, on the other hand, was never tattooed, has married a European farmer, and visibly chafes at her woman's role.”² *Nga tangata toa* was later performed by Rangimoana Taylor's group Kilimogo Productions in 1997, and by Taki Rua Productions in 2006. Hone Kouka, whose theatre career began at Taki Rua's predecessor The Depot, later founded the Wellington independent company Tawata with playwright Miria George. Tawata has held a Matariki Festival annually since 2010, incorporating theatrical voices from Māori knowledge holders. In 2009 Kouka was made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his services to Māori theatre. The 1990s also saw the development of the marae theatre where the marae was seen as a space for performance, where the kaumātua is crucial to the production and according to Hone Kauka, the kaumātua's name should head the list of cast members.

Te reo Māori theatre which includes Briar Grace-Smith's *Waitapu* (1996) along with new theatre forms in the twenty first century have moved beyond the agitprop theatre and marae based traditional stories. Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement, also well-known as screen actors and directors, turned legends into irreverent comedy in *The untold tales of Maui*, which toured nationally in 2003–4. Playwrights such as Albert Belz (*Awhi tapu*, *Yours truly*, *Te karakia*) and Whiti Hereaka (*Fallow*, *Te kaupoi*, *Raw men*) have dealt with issues not previously seen as intrinsically Māori. In 2010, the first annual Taonga Whakaari – Māori Playwrights Festival in Auckland included the 24-Hour Deadline Theatre Challenge, in which five playwrights had 12 hours to write a 15-minute play, which was performed the following night. In April 2012 six feature-length dramas appeared on television as the series *Atamira*. Each work had originally been written for the stage by a different Māori playwright. The series was co-produced by Taki Rua as part of an expansion into film and television production.

² Carnegie, David. “Theatre Journal.” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1995, pp. 310–311. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3208498. Accessed 25.12.2017.

It is evident therefore that Māori theatre is a living tradition, which reflects the tumultuous changes in Māori society and culture. In the words of Hone Kouka, “I think Māori-language literature can help strengthen the language. I am working more in that area, and there are great initiatives of more work (drama) in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language). Plays in the Māori language and the establishment of Māori television have helped to strengthen the Māori voice. I think not only the word but putting out any element of Māoridom to the art world is beneficial to all.”³

Māori theatre reflects Māori identity and ethnicity and form a trajectory of the revitalization of Māori language and culture.



³ Kouka, Hone. “A Brief Conversation with Hone Kouka.” *World Literature Today*, vol. 81, no. 5, 2007, pp. 35–36. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40038591.